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BACCHUS AND ARIADNE;
A DRAMA.

REV. CAVALIERE MEREWETHER.



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BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

A Drama

BY
JOHN MEREWETHER
REV. (CAVALIERE) MEREWETHER

KNIGHT OF THE ORDER OF THE CROWN OF ITALY

EX-CHAPLAIN AT VENICE

AUTHOR OF 'SEMELE: A VENETIAN TALE'

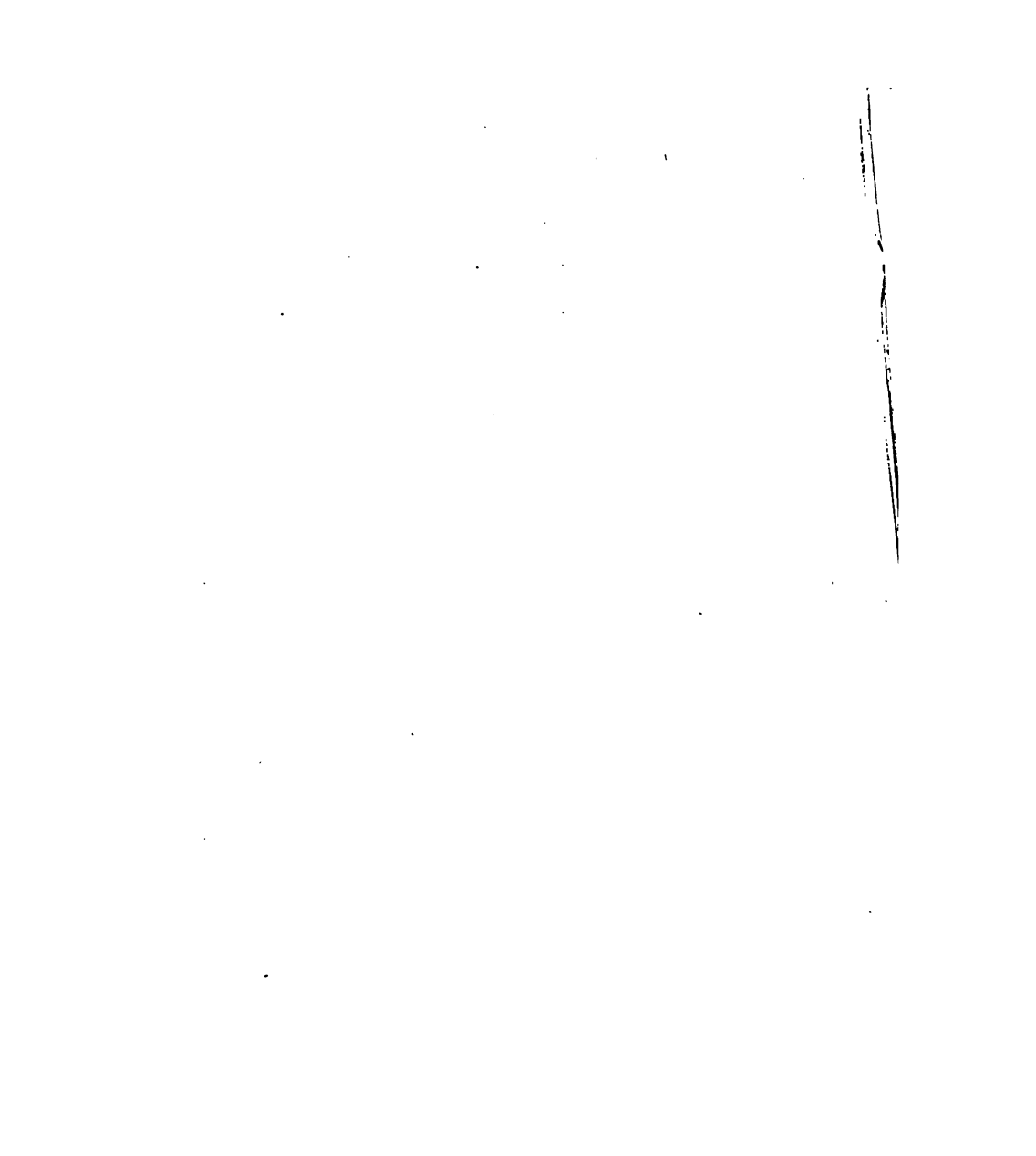


LONDON

J. T. HAYES, 17 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO. LTD.

1891



DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF THE GREAT PAINTER

JACOPO ROBUSTI TINTORETTO

WHOSE INIMITABLE PENCIL ADORNS THE DUCAL PALACE AT VENICE

WITH THE
BRIDAL OF BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

PALAZZO CONTARINI-TROVASO
VENICE



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THESEUS, Son of Ægeus, King of Athens.

ARIADNE, Daughter of Minos, King of Crete, and Pasiphaë.

EGLA, Daughter of Panopeus, King of Naxos.

BACCHUS.

ATTENDANT of Theseus, an Athenian.

NURSE of Ariadne, a Cretan.

ANGELOS, Nuntius.

CHORUS of Naxian Vine-dressers.

TIME : *A few hours.*

PLACE : *Garden of the King of Naxos. Interior of the Palace of the King of Naxos. Summit of hill overlooking the sea inclosed in the grounds of the Palace of the King of Naxos.*

ACTION : *Simple.*



ARIADNE



ACT I.

Nurse of Ariadne. Hard is the lot of those whom duty
calls

To leave their well-belovéd Fatherland,
And dwell with strangers. Hard is it to leave
The roof where first we drew our infant breath,
The fields where first we played our childish plays ;
But harder yet it is to leave for aye
Friends and acquaintance, kinsfolk, parents—all
With whom we've lived in fond companionship.
Farewell, farewell, I ne'er shall see ye more.
And thou, dear Crete, my wave-encircled home

Rich with all beauty, lost art thou to me !
Never again is given to me to climb
Thy foliaged steeps, O Ida, thence to gaze
With gaze untiring on the scene below,
Where sea and river, wood and pasture mead,
Corn-field and clustering vine and peasant's cot,
And lordly pile and grove-encircled shrine,
And populous city with its busy port,
Mingle in beauty-breathing brotherhood ;
Mingle—until the haze of far away
Shroud all in indistinctness—O farewell !
Strange that the gods should launch us into life
In torture, not in joyousness, to dwell !

Attendant of Theseus. Blame not the immortal gods,
woman of Crete ;

By them an equal share of good and ill
Is meted out to all ; with us it lies
To lessen or increase the original store.
I, too, at duty's stern command, have lived
An exile from my home for many a day ;
Now haste I to adore my household gods,

And greet with joy the loved ones of my youth.

Yet much I marvel wherefore tarrieth here
In Naxos' isle so many weary days,
Theseus my lord, great Ægeus' mighty son.
From Crete departing, blessed by favouring winds,
We sailed direct for Athens as thou know'st ;
And there had soon arrived, had not the gods
Neptune and Æolus, with wrath divine
Moved, or indulging in some strange caprice,
Poured on our bark their concentrated rage,
And driven her reeling through the foamy brine,
Of sails and oars bereft, with rifted sides,
Tracked by sea monsters glaring on their prey ;
Till on our lee this friendly port appeared,
And like a tutelar goddess oped its arms
To take us in, the tempest-tossed. Since then
Full many a weary month has come and gone.
Our gallant ship refitted, crew refreshed,
The Lady Ariadne yearning, too,
Her new Athenian home to greet with joy,

What keeps my lord an idler on this strand,
Him the destroyer of fell beasts of prey
And slayer of the Marathonian bull?

Nurse. What keeps thy lord an idler on this strand?
Go ask the Lady Egla, blind of sight!
Go ask the Circe of this vine-clad isle,
Daughter of Panopēus, Naxos' King.
Seest thou not how this wanton Naxian girl
Folds in her nets the stout Athenian heart,
And lulls him with her subtle sorceries?
Whilst he, forgetful of the loving form
That safely brought him forth from Cretan toils,
The Labyrinth and loathsome Minotaur,
Hotly responds to her illicit lust,
And, slave to her entreaties, still delays
To hoist his ship's broad mainsail, and conduct
The pining Ariadne to her home.
This keeps thy lord an idler on this strand;
This makes him faithless to his guiding star.
In this dark world of ours one thing is clear:
Playthings are we to men, mere children's toys,

Loved, petted, played with, shattered, swept away.

Attendant. Cease thy sinister tattle ; know'st thou not
Masters in servants' eyes should be as gods ;
And we should have nor eye, nor ear, nor tongue
To scan and criticise their faults. But see
The Lady Ariadne this way moving,
With faltering steps and eyes that dream of love.

Ariadne. Where is my lord ? O ! who has seen my lord ?
My Theseus, sole possessor of my thoughts ?
I seek him everywhere and find him not.
Through the recesses of yon lordly pile,
And through these happy gardens, fitter far
For gods, than mortals ; where our kingly host
Anticipates Elysium ; far and near
I seek my Theseus but I find him not.
O sweetly bitter love ! O bitter sweet !
How hast thou leaped on me, and filled my heart
With joy and anguish, peace and war ! For when
I have him present, my concentered being,
Wrapt in tranquillity ineffable,
Floats in the ether of a passive bliss,

Ripe satisfaction of all fond aspirings,
Fulness of life that spirits cannot feel
Being bodiless. But when he leaves my side,
The well-spring of my life seems all dried up :
Gapes at my trembling feet the yawning earth,
Deep beneath deep disclosing. Vaguest fears
Assault my soul, and dark presentiments
Wail round me like deep groans from Tartarus.
And Ariadne's self, O death-like change !
No more is Ariadne, but a tomb
Rank with crushed hopes and longings unfulfilled.

Chorus. (Ariadne meanwhile goes about in the proximity, looking for Theseus.)

Strophe.

All things most clearly prove
That what the world calls love
Is like the lightning's flash,
Blazing a fitful radiance through the skies ;
Then dies

Away in darkness and in ruin.
Through the dim obscure of life,
Scene of never ending strife,
Darts this bright object with portentous glow.
Fain would we warm our sympathies
At its effulgencies.
Too late we find amid our fierce unrest
A quenchless fire raging in our breast,
Which brings no fostering light,
But blasts our eager sight.
Then, scorched and blind, we sadly grope our way.

Anti-Strophe.

As swimmers in a seething ocean,
Borne onward by the maddened waves' commotion,
Ride heavenward on a crested giant billow,
And then in alternation swift
Down to the lowest deeps most helplessly do drift :
So haps it to all those who fain would prove
The heavenward heights and hellward depths of love.

Ariadne (interrupting). Who dares blaspheme the holy
name of love ?

Love is our very being, our soul's stay,
Subtlest of all elixirs, without which
Life dwindles into death ; and those who say
That Love's a thing of naught resemble much
Frail images of clay, mere senseless things,
Of thought and feeling unpossessed.

Chorus. Yet we
Are not unpractised in Love's mysteries.

Ariadne. Suspicion dwells with those of low degree.

Chorus. But eyes and ears are common gifts to all.

Ariadne. Yet eyes and ears are guided by the soul,
And soul is not a common gift to all.

Chorus. All things lie hidden in the womb of Time.

Ariadne. Time shall bring forth my happiness ere long.

Chorus. Deep in the womb of Time lie Night and
Day ;

Now Day is born, and now we're lost in Night.

Ariadne. Cease your dark riddles. See ! my Day
appears,

For here comes Theseus with his stately stride,
E'en as the sun slow rising from the sea,
Putting to flight your petty mists of doubt.

Theseus. O Lady Ariadne, art thou here
Alone with these? Good, honest folk, no doubt ;
But scarcely fit companions for my queen.

Ariadne. Pardon, my lord : for many a weary hour
Within the palace precincts far and near,
Within these gardens, fit abode of gods,
I have been seeking thee ; for, thou away,
An aching void doth gnaw my true heart's core.
And so to pass the leaden-footed time
I've had a play of words with these poor peasants,
Who, in their want of wisdom, would persuade me
That love is death to lover and beloved.

Theseus. Half may be true of this, and half be false.

Ariadne. Oh no, my lord ! 'Tis altogether false.
To love and be beloved can not be death,
But life on earth and life beyond the stars.

Theseus. Flames that most quickly burn most quickly
die ;

And love too ardent diets on itself.

Ariadne. Half-love is but the mimicry of love,
A shadow without substance ; all or none
Mine be the lot to prove ; mine be the lot,
Possessing all, to live ; but less, to die :
And thou, my warm heart's centre, well know'st this.
But tell me, dearest lord, why this delay,
This tarrying of our ship in this fair isle,
When I would fain a fairer home embrace ?
Time was when from our battered ship arose
The sound of shipwright's hammer, and the smoke
Of pitch, the healer of the gaping rift.
But all is silent now : the work is done,
And the new sail flaps idly on the mast
Itself as new ; and the impatient crew
Pour forth libations to the perilous gods
That rule the passive ocean with their might,
Praying departure prompt, arrival swift.

Theseus. Dear lady, irksome are the thoughts of
those

Whom the Fates call to exercise their sway

O'er troops of men and arduous enterprises,—
Thoughts that would crush a woman's fragile heart
Even to think ; but how to draw them out
Into the stormy action of the real
Were of itself so harsh an argument
As not to be discussed 'fore women's eyes.

Ariadne. Your meaning, gracious lord, is hard to
learn.

Am I unused to arduous enterprises,
Who drew thee from the Labyrinth unscathed,
Mocking the fell devouring Minotaur ;
Then found thee ship and crew to bear thee swift
From deadly Crete's inhospitable shore,
In spite of father's curse and people's rage ?

Theseus. Things of great count detain me in this
isle.

Ariadne. Are not your queen's desires of greater
count ?

Theseus. Not when they clash with interests of state.

Ariadne. Ah me ! What anguish for a woman's
heart,

To be but second where she once was first !

Theseus. He who to woman's will in weakness bends
Abjures his sex, absorbed in womanhood.

Ariadne. He who to woman owes his life, his all,
How can he cancel such indebtedness ?

Theseus. Lady, forbear ; remind me not of debt :
A debt too often named must lose its worth
Self-cancelled, and the obligation dies.
Most true that with the silken clue thou gav'st
I traced the mazes of the Labyrinth ;
Most true that with thine aid I fled with joy
That felon isle, the monster-breeding Crete ;
But no less true that for these loving deeds
Thou didst receive the guerdon of my hand,
And, wedding Theseus, fitly hast become
The honoured consort of a demigod,
To bear him sons immortal as himself.
Content thee, Lady, with thy well-earned lot :
Into the deep recesses of my heart
Forbear to search : an over-curious mind
Tortures itself and spreads confusion round.

[*Exit.*

Ariadne. O bitterness of love ! O deadly sweet !
My lord incensed withdraws his stately form,
Leaving me desolate without a home.
My childhood's early home is lost for aye,
And my new home's concentered in my lord :
Thus when his gracious presence quits my sight,
Homeless, abandoned, sinks my fainting soul
All sun-forsaken into blackest night.
Woe that I dared to argue with my lord !
Woe that I dared to differ from my lord !
At his loved feet I'll throw my prostrate form,
And never rise until his gracious lips
Have pardoned all the errors of my tongue.

Ariadne hastily follows in the direction that Theseus took ; but seeing him enter the part of the palace inhabited by Egla, daughter of the king of Naxos, checks herself and exclaims :

What do I see ? My Theseus takes his way,
Not to the port where lies his waiting ship
Ready for prompt departure, but *there, there,*
The home of the King's daughter ! Can it be ?

Impossible ! Some demon blasts my sight,
Making me see awry. Yes, yes ! No, no !
No welcome demon blasts my aching sight.
O that he would, and with one happy stroke
So cure my aching heart ! And now, see now !
She featly moves to meet him, her flushed face
With false smiles garlanded ; and now, ah me !
She takes him by the hand, and straightly leads
Him not unwilling to her innermost home.
O Ariadne, thou art doomed to die !
O cruel Theseus, thou hast crushed to death
A writhing insect underneath thy feet.
Then love's the thing of count that keeps thee here,
And love the absorbing interests of state !
And love for whom ? For me, thy saviour ? No !
Love for another, who has never risked
Her life for thine, nor loved thee as I do.
One who had all the world to choose from, save
Thee, my beloved one, loving me no more.
But yet, perchance, I wrong my gracious lord !
Perchance the aged King awaits him there

To aid with counsel sage his high emprise.
Would that it were so ! But those looks of love
That darted from her eyes, her visage flushed
With joy triumphant as she took his hand
To lead him inwards, his responsive smiles
And quickened step beneath her gentle force,
Tell not of counsels sage, nor words of weight,
But rather language of the realms of love.

Ah me ! Ah me ! I wander here and there
Torn by incertitude ; and my young life
I'll gladly give to those who want more life.
What's life to me, whose aim in life is gone ?
To be is not to be ; to live is death.
O come Lethæan flood, wash out the past
Of one who now inhabits Tartarus.
A denizen of earth no more, no more,
I dwell among the damned at Pluto's court.
Sad court ! where dwell three-headed Cerberus,
The Parcæ, and the fierce Eumenides.
My lord is false to me, and leaves my side :

Then I'll be false to him, and cry for aid
To one more mighty far than Theseus is,—
To Death, the monarch of the lives of men,
To Death, the mower of all human grass,
Whom none escape. O glorious, radiant Death,
Destroyer of all pain, destroy my pain.
With one kind stroke transfix this aching heart,
And bear me breathless to thy happy halls,
Where dwell eternal peace, oblivion sweet,
Whence sorrow flies ; where sad hearts throb no more.

[*Exit.*

Chorus. The gods without some drawback give us
naught :

They will not have perfection here below ;
All that we have is very dearly bought
By endless travail, agony, and woe.
Thus love, that gift divine, which gladdens earth,
Is given us only on this one condition :
That jealousy with love which has its birth,
Shall carry with it love's entire perdition.
And thus we sway, unknowing what to clasp ;

Our very virtues carry stings of vice,
Helpless to stem the inexorable law
That tightly binds us with its iron grasp.
For jealousy is not a common ill,
It looms gigantic, poisoning the blood,
Darts through the healthy frame a deathlike chill,
And turns bright joy into a hellish mood.
Unhappy lady, in whose trusting breast
That poison plant has shed its noxious seed ;
How many moments yet of fierce unrest
The fates reserve for thee in direst need !

ACT II.

INTERIOR OF THE PALACE.

Egla. Nay, urge me not, my lord, to do this thing.
I am untutored in the ways of love,
Living apart from men in this lone isle,
My father's sole companion. My young steps
Were never guided by a mother's hand,
Nor have my virgin thoughts been ever trained
In the strict school of what befits a woman.
Forgive my childish prattle, O dread lord,
I know not what love is ; but this I know,
That when thou lightedst on our Naxian shores
To my rapt gaze thou seemedst mighty Zeus,
Breathing around all beauty and all might.

Theseus. And I know this, O beauty's incarnation,
That when I landed from my storm-tossed ship,
And thy fair presence gleamed upon my sight,

Methought I landed upon Paphian soil,
And worshipped thee as goddess of the isle.
And now I wait for thee, for my fond heart
Can never live in widowed solitude.

One life henceforth be ours, one mind, one soul,
An uniform existence without break.

One life shall thrill us with ecstatic glow ;
One death inclose us in eternal night.

But why these tears, dear lady, which escape
Unbidden through the silken veils that bar
Access to those bright orbs that shame the sun ?

Egla. O my dread lord, that art a god to me,
Why dost thou mock me, friendless as I am ?
Thou know'st what barrier stands twixt thee and me.
All these fond dreams are phantoms of the brain,
Ne'er to be realised. Wouldst have me slave
Of one whom blindest chance has made thy queen—
Of one my equal ? and in every way
Perhaps not that. Of unstained lineage I :
No monstrous love has fouled my father's hearth,
No Minotaur disgraced my mother's womb.

Naxos contains no living tomb in which
Athenian youths and maidens lie engulfed.
And if fond Ariadne aided thee
To rid the world of this impurity,
Pasiphaë's daughter, it must be confessed,
Showed small affection for her bovine brother.

Theseus. Cease, Egla, cease ; that railing irony
Befits nor thee to speak, nor me to hear.

Egla. But I *will* speak and thou *must* hear, or I
To the recesses of my father's house
Will straight betake myself, and there abide
Until the ship of Theseus and his bride
Has vanished in dim distance. More than hate
Bear I to Ariadne. Her sad face,
Pregnant with woes fictitious ; her wronged look ;
Her fixed eyes gazing forward into space
In seeming apathy of dumb despair ;
Her pale brows knit in mimic agony,
Seeking for consolation ; piteous look
That to the unwary moans in tragic note
' Behold a victim here most foully wronged,

Betrayed by one who owes his all to her'—
Such cunning acting of a cunning heart
Drives me to frenzy insupportable.
No, my dread lord, whilst Ariadne lives,
Thine I can never be ; earth may not hold
Her hateful form and mine. Speak not of love,
Or flight, or access to my innermost heart,
Until I contemplate those rival cheeks
Blanched by the kiss of death.

Theseus.

That may not be ;

Sacred to me is Ariadne's life,
E'en if my love grow fainter than it was.
To war with women is not Theseus' wont.
I will not merit the assassin's doom :
Revengeful Furies gnawing at my heart,
Turning to hate the love I bear towards thee.
Nay ! be advised, sweet lady : be content
To tear a stout heart from its resting-place,
And lay it on thine own in fond enthrallment.

Egla. Frail are we women, plastic, flexible,

No match for men with all their honeyed tongue

And, if that fail, brute force. A victim I
Of too much love for one who amply takes,
But sparingly pays back the precious boon.

Theseus. You have my love, dear Egla, be content
With that, and cease to crave the life of one
I honour, though the freshness of first love
Has passed away.

Egla. My lord, I bow my head
And rest thy slave. Who can withstand the gods?

*Egla falls down and worships Theseus. He lovingly
embraces her and raises her. At that moment
Ariadne enters and utters a shriek of grief and
despair, saying as she looks towards the sun :*

O Helios, unfailing fount of light
And everything that appertains to light,
Canst thou behold this wrong, and yet shine on,
Unconscious of eclipse? I conjure thee
To hear the sobbings of my tortured heart.
Was it for this I left my princely home?
Was it for this I earned my father's curse
Amid the fierce howls of the Cretan mob?

O bitter guerdon of my loving pains !-
Theseus mine own no longer, pity me,
If capable of pity thy stern heart !
Sheathe thy bright sword within my aching breast,
And send me to consort with Proserpine !
No happy home was mine in early days :
From father's, mother's touch I shrank abashed,
Unknowing why I shrank, instinctive, perhaps,
Of the foul moral poison that lurked there ;
And thus within the mazes of my home
In solitary girlhood I grew up,
Nor loving nor beloved—a desert waste
My heart of hearts, unknowing where to turn—
When on my lone horizon gleamed a god,
A god-man, man-god, Zeus himself he seemed,
Divine and human grafted into 'one.
Up rose this sun before my dazzled gaze,
And bathed me with the radiance of his beams,
So that my heart's death ceased, and my soul lived.

Fleet passed my days in this Sun-god's embrace,
Careering in light bonds of careless joy :

Whether I walked on earth or swam in air
I scarcely knew ; a sense of blissful joy
Pervaded my whole being, and I breathed
A glowing atmosphere of happy dreams,
Nor sleeping nor yet waking. Thus I lived,
Brim-full my cup of life. Why cam'st thou not,
O Death, thou cruelly capricious Power,
To round my glad life by a happy sleep?
For soon this Sun-god ceased to throw his beams
Upon my lovelorn heart as in the past.
Cold and more cold he shone, until at last
He chilled me with his scintillating rays,
And left me frozen with a killing frost.
Thou art this Sun, O Theseus, ever thou
Mine idol, hero, demigod in one.
But with diminished lustre thy blest beams
Have lately gilded me, until at last
Thou hid'st thy face from me and leav'st me plunged
In all the helplessness of blackest night.
And more than that : thy light, denied to me,
Goes to illume another orb than mine,

One who has sought with surreptitious wiles
To intercept those beams, my privilege
And right, by me, alas ! too dearly bought.
O vileness of all those who by base theft
Seek to possess what Nature has withheld.

*This appeal to Theseus has been delivered in a half
crouching, half kneeling attitude at his feet.
Now Egla interposes herself with insolent
violence between Ariadne and her Lord, and
in a mocking tone, leaning against Theseus,
thus addresses her :*

Our crouching sister wails o'er much, methinks.

*Ariadne starts up to her full height, and with
dignity exclaims :*

To thee, nefarious robber of my peace,
Daring to intercept my Sun-god's beams,
I neither crouch nor wail ! Back to thy place,
Impurity ! thou blight of nuptial joys,
And canker-worm of all men hold most dear !
Avaunt ! And boast amid a bestial crew
Of sister concubines thy latest feat,

How from the purest heaven starts grimly forth
Hell at thy bidding, blasting far and near ;
And where was order, holiness and love,
Foul chaos sets his mark. Now, leave me ! Go !

Egla. Pasiphaë's daughter drives me from her sight !
O happy exile from the side of one
Who revels in a monstrous brotherhood.
Fair Naxos' daughter surely can dispense
With friendship proffered from so vile a fount.

*Egla says this, preparing to go ; and, as she is
leaving, Ariadne accompanies her departure
with these words :*

Ariadne. Go, go, dissembling traitress, and no more
With venomous tongue insult thine injured guest.

*Then Ariadne, whose character seems to have sud-
denly changed, turns to Theseus, who has stood
by speechless with astonishment at this scene,
and says :*

Ariadne. And thou too, Theseus, monster-slayer thou ;
Hast thou nor tongue nor arm to rid the earth
Of that fell female monster who throws nets

To draw the heedless to her dire embrace,
And thus absorb them into her foul blood ?
Methinks that Phœa merited more grace
From thy far-sweeping falchion : she indeed
Paid for her unchaste past full penalty.
Shall Phœa perish and yet Egla live ?

At this taunt Theseus becomes furious and exclaims :

What blasting fury rises in my path
Barring my onward way ? Can this be one
Of Nature's master-works, as erst she was ?
Can this be Ariadne, loving, meek,
And pliant to my yet unspoken wish ?
Art thou a Proteus capable of change,
And infinite enshapements, fierce and mild,
The wrathful tigress and the lowly lamb ?—
All, all by turns ; until at length my hand,
Eager to clasp thee, clutches a death snake,
Ready to shed its venom in my blood ?

Ariadne. Snakes bite not unassailed ; when trampled
on,
Woe to the trampler ! Theseus, woe to thee !

No Proteus I! That wily one would change
His shape, and rechange, twenty times a day,
Now bright with beauty, and now grim as hell ;
But I now change my nature once for all,
And sternness reigns supreme within my breast.
Vanished for aye, my all-absorbing love
Leaves recollections swarming with dark hate.
Did I not see thy lustful paramour,
Her eyes all sparkling with unchaste desire,
Conduct thee to the sty wherein she dwells,
Another Circe, but without her charms?
And thou e'en now didst blindly suffer her,
Without reproach, to leave me standing here,
And nestle in thy bosom. And must I
Tamely submit to such indignity
To whom thou art indebted for thine all?
This, this the cause my being's changed, and where
Fertile with fondest hopes dwelt happy peace
A bleak and arid desert grimly frowns !
Theseus. Thy mad words, Ariadne, urge me on
To drive me from thy presence, wife no more.

Some demon must impel thee to thy ruin.
Let thy fierce tongue be silent and confess
A demigod in me, second to none ;
And, so confessing, harass me no more.

*Theseus then slowly retires, and, as he leaves
Ariadne, she exclaims :*

Leaving my side thou rushest to *thy* ruin.
Return, thou father of my unborn child :
E'en now I could forgive thee, erring prince,
And from my bosom chase these lurid thoughts
That lately have possessed me, hell-inspired.

*She then sees him go towards Egla's dwelling ; her
rage returns, and she says :*

Ariadne. Again to Circe's fold thou tak'st thy way,
Unconscious of remorse, ungrateful prince.
May the immortal gods, the ever-just,
O'erwhelm thee with unutterable doom !
Go, vanish mid the clouds of coming night,
And may my curses settle round thine heart !

*She then retires into the background of the garden,
and the Chorus begins.*

Chorus. Women allied to heroes profit naught :
Their lords are not for them, but for the world.
He that has myriad worshippers around
Will not confine his worship to the one.
Theseus, Trœzene-born, in life's fresh youth
Through perilous paths to Athens wends his way
To greet his father Ægeus, Athens' king ;
And as he travels, dangers round him lurk
From fell wild beast and cruel robber's hand—
Procrustes, Sciron, Synnis and the rest.
With valorous hand he cleaves his onward way,
And brings mild peace where rapine reigned before.
But e'en in Attica his fate averse
Gave him no resting-place from toils and plots
Laid by his jealous kinsmen, doomed themselves
To suffer by the death they'd planned for him.

But hark ! in Athens' streets a voice of dread,
A fearful bellow mixed with shriek of rage !
This was the wild bull, bred at Marathon,
Who to the Attic youth with threatening horn
Denied all ingress to his pastures wide,

And filled the land with terror and dismay.
Fast by the horns the hero held his prize,
Caught and subdued by Phœbus' aid, and so
Drew him reluctant to the Sun-God's shrine,
And spineward plunged the sacrificial knife.
Soon after, when the cry supreme arose
From Athens of her progeny bereft,
Swept from her side to feed the Minotaur,
The hero with self-sacrifice sublime
Himself devoted to the monster's jaws.

Arrived at Crete, he plunged with face serene
Into that darksome den, the Labyrinth,
Planned and composed with true Dædalian art ;
And there engaged the fear-inspiring form
Of man and bull combined, unreasoning brute,
And scarce subjected e'en to instinct's sway.
A sinewy mass of savage flesh was he,
Scarcely traced out in semibovine form.
Such horrid monster ne'er disfigured hell
As this foul tenant of Pasiphaë's womb.

The brazen gates attained, the guards around

Would fain have wrested from the Athenian youth
Great Ægeus' sword, his mother's parting gift.
Two guards he killed outright, whereat the rest
Hurled him within, mid cries of rage and fear.

The monster slept, full gorged the day before
With flesh of hapless victims foully slain.
Plunged in the darksome twilight of that cave
Theseus at first saw naught, but heard therein
The gruesome snortings of some giant beast
That sleeps away its meal. At length his eye
Caught a vast form extended on the ground,
Lying confused, a mass of shaggy hair.
Out of this hill of hair protruded limbs,
Or what seemed limbs : strict likeness there was none.
A hoof protruded here, a forearm there,
While in the midst, reclining on the right,
Was shadowed forth the semblance of a head ;
And what a head ! The eyes were veiled by sleep,
But underward a mouth cavernous yawned,
With jaws that bore a triple row of teeth,
Able to crush with their portentous power

Whatever prey. And from this gulf profound
Came mighty breathings of the horrible beast
Sated with food ; and with this breath there came
A noxious stench that would have poisoned hell.
No further time had lordly Theseus then
To contemplate the object of his hate.
Sleep reigned no longer in that mass inert,
And a slight restless tremor took its place.
Then Theseus with a giant's effort drove
His long sword down the monster's open throat,
And, leaping on him, bent his ghastly head
Back on his croup with compress terrible.
'Twas then the Minotaur, thus prostrate laid,
With Theseus striding o'er his hair-clad chest,
Set up a roar of baffled rage and pain,
Which heard was far beyond the city gates,
And made the many wonder what had happened.
But Theseus, as he gashed the monster's throat
With wounds prodigious, shaken by the fray,
Let go his hold of that good blade which was
All that he had to combat with ; and so

The grim beast with a hideous bellow leapt
Up on his legs, and clasping tight the youth
Within his dire arms hurled him as a ball
Against the cavern's side ; then seized his club,
That club sole comrade of his lonely life,
And chased the hero round the vast recess,
Bruised and half stunned, disabled, weary, spent.
But the dark blood that welled from every wound
Impeded the fierce onslaught of the bull,
And gave him staggering steps, uncertain, slow.
Theseus was young and fleet, his peril passed ;
He swiftly traversed every foot of ground,
Seeking his sword, his sole defence and stay.
No respite was there from this cruel foe,
Who slowly followed with uplifted club,
Hoping to crush the doomed one, doomed himself.
Then all seemed lost, irrevocably lost,
For Theseus could no more prolong the fight,
Though the Bull-Man was wounded mortally.

Marvel of marvels ! Dear the great gods are :

Dearest in our extremity of need.
What do we see? What form divine is that
Which on a narrow ledge of rock above
Or stands or floats? A woman's form it seems
Of beauty rare, and in its hand it holds
A sword, the sword of Theseus, and makes signs
That he advance and take it from her hand.
A fearful bellow rent the startled air
As the Man-Monster rallied all his force
And with a clumsy gallop hurried up
To clutch the deadly arm. But Theseus, he,
Who as the lightning's flash had conquered space,
Rushed past the brute to where she stood, and dropped
Into his hands the blade. A moment more,
And the swift club descending must have crushed
The hero in an undistinguished mass ;
But, quickly turning, he received the breast
Of the fell speeding beast on his sword's point.
The heart was pierced ; fell from the hands the club ;
Blood welled in gushing streams, and that huge form
Fell at the feet of Theseus, hideous ruin.

Our Theseus, victor in this mortal strife,
Swooned off into a state of dreamless sleep,
First cousin of grim death. How long he lay,
He knew not ; but at length the trance passed off.
He woke, and shuddered as he woke ; for round
The half light of his prison gloamed ; therein
A deathlike silence reigned, and o'er him yawned
His late foe's horrid jaws. His trusty sword,
Black with thick gore, lay idly at his side.
He shouted, but his shouts no answer brought ;
He tried the gates, but found no egress there.
Then Theseus first knew grief. He wept aloud,
And, in his weeping, uttered his first plaint
Against the gods who now abandoned him :
' If I must die, let me be crowned in death
With the fierce shouts of warring combatants,
Victor or vanquished, glory of the strife.
But if stern fate decree that I must die
In these dark halls of silent solitude
Without one voice to cheer my parting breath,
I, who have hewn my way to deathless fame,

Do curse that fate ; and curse the gods' decrees
That brought me into life ; who send me thence
Young, famous, with so much yet unperformed.'
Thus moaned the hero. Quick the answer came.
Upon that same rock whence th' etherial form
Had dropped in Theseus' hands the saving sword
Appeared again that form of loveliness,
Bright heaven centered in her virgin face,
Who thus addressed to him her silver speech :
' Blame not the immortal gods, Athenian prince !
They act in many ways on mortals here
Directly, or through agents foreordained.
Their work is always done or soon or late.
Be calm, be patient ever, and pry not
Into the hidden ways of those above.
I by the gods thou hast blasphemed was sent
To free thee from the loathsome Minotaur.
The royal daughter of this isle am I,
And Ariadne is the name I bear.
Think not I came here by my father's wish :
He wished thy death, O Prince, but I thy life.

And for the deed I've done in saving thee
My home, the home of my few sad short years,
No longer will be mine. The palace gates
Will aye be shut against me, and the end
I dare not contemplate, a dark expanse.'
'Beautiful Being,' Theseus quick replied,
'Hast thou not been the saviour of my life?
How can I render thee thy priceless gift?
No longer am I Theseus' self, but thine,
Thine, fair possessor of a hero's heart,
Who gladly merges all his former self
Into the self of Ariadne. Fair
Redeemer of my life, my fame, my all,
Henceforth I cling to thy blest slavery.
Once safe embarked upon my ready ship
I take thee back to Athens as my bride,
And future queen of Attica, my home.'
'With thee I shall be happy, gracious prince,'
The lovely lady tearfully replied ;
'I know it, feel it ; from the very first
I loved thee for thy fame ; but now—but now—

I love thee for thyself ; and by thy side
Will face all dangers, fearing naught with thee.
And now we part ; I, by a secret way ;
Thou, through the mazes of this labyrinth.
First take these keys, which ope the brazen doors
Of this dark prison ; and then take this clue
Of thread to guide thee through the tangled ways
Which soon will lead thee to the outer gates
Of this dark house of Death. Repair thee then
On board the ship, wherein the first to greet
Theseus the Great will be his Ariadne.'
She vanished from his sight, and he o'erjoyed
Obeyed her orders, found her as she said,
Hoisted his mainsail, and ere many hours,
Despite the clamours of the Cretan mob,
Had left the port ; his child-wife Ariadne
Clasped in his valorous arms, a willing prize.
O change from day to night ; from Life to Death !
Alas ! alas ! How soon this fond child-wife,
Timid and yielding, thrilling with love's fluid,
A Fury has become and cursed her lord

With words of hatred, deep and terrible !
Of this the demon Jealousy is cause.
Were the gods pitiless when they decreed
That Jealousy and Love should be twin-born ?
It seems so. By the former men lose more
Than they can gain by Love.

ACT III.

Angelos. Well met, good friends, ye dressers of the vine,
Beloved of Bacchus, lightener of our woes.
Bearer of solemn news, I come full straight
From yonder busy port, hard by the sea
I pray you all, direct me where to find
The Cretan Ariadne, Theseus' spouse
And guest of Panopēus, our loved lord.

Chorus. Your steps betoken haste, your brow dark
thoughts,
That do affright us ere we learn their import.
Every recess and leafy hiding-place
In palace, park and garden do we know.
If Ariadne's there, of this be sure
That fewest steps will lead us to her presence.

They leave the stage. The scene changes and discovers Ariadne sitting in a bower almost hidden by flowers. The Chorus approach her with the Angelos at their head. Ariadne startled, says :

Ariadne. O vision of dire import ! What means this ?

Ye children of the vine—whose wont it is
To break with joyous songs the daily toil,
Your footsteps wedded to sweet harmonies—
Approach me now with sad funereal measure
Behind a leader whose pale face, sad eyes
Proclaim him messenger from Pluto's court.
Speak, harbinger of woe, if woe it be,
I wait to hear, but let your tale be brief.

Angelos. Lies, Lady, can be made or short or long,
According to the bent of him who speaks ;
But truth, like inspiration, has strict bounds,
Which must be reached, but never overleapt.

Ariadne. Sententious fool ! Whose bleached lips
stutter forth

Vain words, the offspring of a craven heart
Which fears to broach the cause that brought thee
here ;

Let me at once know all thou hast to say :
I can reward as well as punish thee.

Angelos. I will obey, and in few words thus speak :
The galley of thy lord now ploughs the waves,
Thy lord on board, who steers towards Attica.

Ariadne. 'Tis false ! *But now* King Theseus spoke
with me

Here in this palace, *here* in these fair halls ;
What should induce him Athens to approach
Alone, without his queen ?

Angelos. No ! not alone.

Ariadne. Beware thou dost not lie, and merit vengeance !

The crew of course he has with him, none else.

Angelos. Pardon thy servant, lady much deceived.
Alone he was not, for the fairest pearl
That Naxos boasts, Egla divinely fair,
Sole hope of Panopeus' widowed King,

Climbed without fear the galley's lofty stern,
And smiling in the demigod's embrace,
Calmly affronted all Poseidon's might.

Ariadne. 'Tis false, you lie !

Angelos. I lie not, much-wronged queen.

Passing, as is my wont, along the quay
Of Naxos' busy port, I saw, amazed,
The galley of great Theseus, and how changed !
No idle crew were sleeping out of sight ;
No sailless mainmast sprawled upon the deck ;
No unfixed rudder cumbered the nigh shore.
But busy uproar rent the startled air :
And orders shouted to the obedient crew,
O'erjoyed to see once more their much-loved home ;
And then, when all was ready, rudder shipped,
And bellying mainsail flapping on the mast,
That mast which long had lain in blank repose,
A group came crowding through a private door,
Pierced in the wall that chastely circumscribes
Naxos' Elysium, our King's dwelling-place.
Sailors with women grouped and household slaves

Came pouring on, none empty-handed ; some
Bore on their heads house-stuffs and precious robes,
Whilst others, panting, in their hands and arms
Carried along provision for the ship.

I stood and gazed, in wonderment enwrapped,
Waiting what next might be ; when, marvel strange !
Behind the mob of servants a quoit's throw
Great Theseus towered ; and hanging on his arm
Our Naxian princess Egla slowly moved,
With glowing cheeks and fond eyes looking up
Towards her loved comrade, who returned her gaze.

Ariadne. (*With a shriek of pain.*) Ah !

Angelos. And then a longing glance towards Attica
Stole from her eyes, which he interpreting,
Quickened his pace, and hurrying to the bark,
Seized the stout helm, and shouted to the crew :
' Let go the ship, and ply the ready oars.'
Quick at his words the imprisoned cables flew
Home from the rings embedded in the quay.
And then the proud ship moved with motion slow,
As if uncertain whither her course lay.

But Theseus, swift as thunderbolt of Zeus,
Put her before the wind, whilst the bent oars
Ploughed furrows in the ocean's briny breast.
And so amid the lamentations loud
Of those who loved their princess, moved away
Into the blue profound that stately ship ;
And soon between her and our aching eyes
A waste of tossing billows intervened.
This is my tale, O Princess ; if I lie
Let me be scourged to death.

Ariadne.

It shall be so.

Fain would I see the fatal bark that bears
Away to Greece the trait'ress and her dupe.

Angelos. An easy task. Ascend the lofty hill
That rises from the garden's fertile breast
And overhangs the sea. From thence survey
The watery plain that stretches toward the north,
And doubtless on the horizon's utmost verge
Thy ken far reaching will detect the ship
That carries forth great Theseus and his——

Ariadne.

Cease !

Guide me to this cursed spot, which overhangs
The treacherous waves that bear away my lord.

Ariadne hurries away, in company with the messenger and Chorus, towards the summit of the hill which rises from the park of the Palace of the King of Naxos. When she arrives at the summit, which abruptly overhangs the sea, she perceives on the horizon's verge the bark of Theseus under full sail, disappearing in the distance. She then, in an attitude of indignation and despair, exclaims :

Ariadne. O Theseus, once beloved, but now dained ;

Thus see I the sad end of thy false vows
Once too, too welcome to my virgin heart.
Sadder to thee than me, false prince, for know—
Prophetic instinct fills my swelling breast,
And bids me cry with no uncertain cry :
At Athens, bourne of all thy fondest hopes,
Grim doom awaits thee, the grim doom of Death,
A death unworthy of thy life ; but first

Wail for thy father, o'er whose aged form
Thy keel shall pass in sight of Athens' port :
For Ægeus, vast in his paternal love,
By thy false signals cruelly misled,
Despairing to embrace thee ere he die,
Shall set at naught the laws of life and death,
And through the ocean sink to Hades' gloom.
And thou shalt reign a while, until the Fates
Aveñgers of my cause, shall urge thee on
To prey on others as thou'st preyed on me,
And drive thee forth to crave another home
E'en with a jealous rival, Scyros' prince.
And then the end shall come : a treacherous end,
Most adequate ending of a traitor's life.
For from a lofty mount thy murderous host
Through an abyss of infinite descent
Shall hurl thee toppling down to grope thy way
To the grim courts of Proserpine and Dis.
In my prophetic vision, restless prince,
Chained to a rock I see thee struggling ever,
Mad to regain thy lost mobility.

And there an end of thee. My quicker fate
Looms near and nearer ; for the moment when
My keen eye misses from the liquid waste
The mainmast of thy bark with swelling sail,
I, from this height of heights, will seek relief
For my vexed soul and beauteous form despised
Within the waves that murmur at its base.
Little reck I of that young double life
Which throbs within me, since it pleads for thee,
And holds thee up to pity and to love.
No pity and no love expect from me.
That unborn offspring of thy lust, not love,
Will soon be dead with me : my coming night
Shall sweep us both away within its fold,
One to extinction, me where silence dwells.
And now farewell to all I've ever loved
In my short spell of life. Farewell to thee,
Sternest of fathers ; and my servants all,
Who waited on my helpless infancy !
Farewell to these good people, whose quaint song

(Addressing herself to the Chorus)

Has sweetened many a bitter hour of grief !
Farewell to thee, bright Sun, and holy Night
Which brought me and the stars sweet comradeship !
And foliaged Ida, first abode of Zeus,
Within whose forest glades, so legends tell,
Strange monstrous phantom shapes do roam at will ;
Farewell, farewell, my childhood's wonderland !
Perhaps it is my lot once more to see
These ghosts from the Inane, myself a ghost.
O that the gods were half as pitiful
To man, who lies all bleeding at their feet,
As they are ruthless in producing ill !
And now I go to join the spectral past,
For o'er the waste of waters gleams no sail.
Farewell to earth, and welcome any hell !
My sun is set ; infold me, cloudy night.
My past has been but death ; will this be life ?

*Ariadne then throws herself from the summit of the
rock into the sea, and the Chorus on the disap-
pearance of Ariadne over the cliff sings :*

Strophe.

Man must endure his task-work to the end.
Trampling and trampled on he staggers forth,
Out of the womb into the night of life ;
Stumbles and falls, and, like a wilful child, rises to fall
again.

For life he never asked, and yet life came
With all its throbs and throes ;
Could he return into the fatal womb
And not be born again,
What joy to him ! what ceasing of his woes !
Why task the gods to better our cursed fate ?
Can they ? And if they cannot, are they gods ?
Useless to pour the unavailing prayer
In search of a blest boon that ne'er will come.
Can we appease the Unpropitiable ?

Anti-Strophe.

The last resort of common minds has been
Ever to blame th' immortal holy gods—
Who sit just arbiters o'er all things here—

For ills that men have brought upon themselves,
Despite a conscience given them by these gods.
To all who set at naught the rules of right
Inevitably comes just retribution,
Although that retribution tarry long
In coming. The sad lady erred in this :
She thwarted what the gods had planned for her,
And took their place, impatient of control,
Daring the Untried.

United Chorus.

Unhappy dupe of one the world calls chief !
To whom was owing all this chiefship ? Thee !
Thee, Ariadne, who with mystic thread
Ledd'st Theseus from the ready jaws of death.
O hapless victim of ingratitude !
We bless thee as thou leavest earth's bleak shores.
Beautiful Being slighted by the gods ;
Eternal rest go with thee ! Fond farewell !

A pause. Then the Chorus wonderingly exclaims :

Chorus. What prodigy is this ! Supernal sight !

Have the gods struck our vision, that we see
All things around distorted and awry?
Can this be Bacchus on the rolling clouds,
Who towards the empyrean wends his way
In vine-embowered chariot slowly drawn
By lion and by tiger duly tamed?
Pan and Silenus wait upon their lord,
Whilst closing round them rave the Mænades.
From yon deep void this lord of life has risen,
And bears a shape of beauty in his arms.
And this fair shape is Ariadne—lost,
And found again by Semele's great son.
See how he brings the blush into her cheeks
By never-ending kisses; see his arms
Enlace her with indissoluble bond;
And watch his godlike breast with quickening pulse
Thrill life into her bosom. Now he takes
From the illimitable ether round
A gorgeous seven-starred diadem, the which
Shall shine in after ages far and near,
A constellation to the end of time,

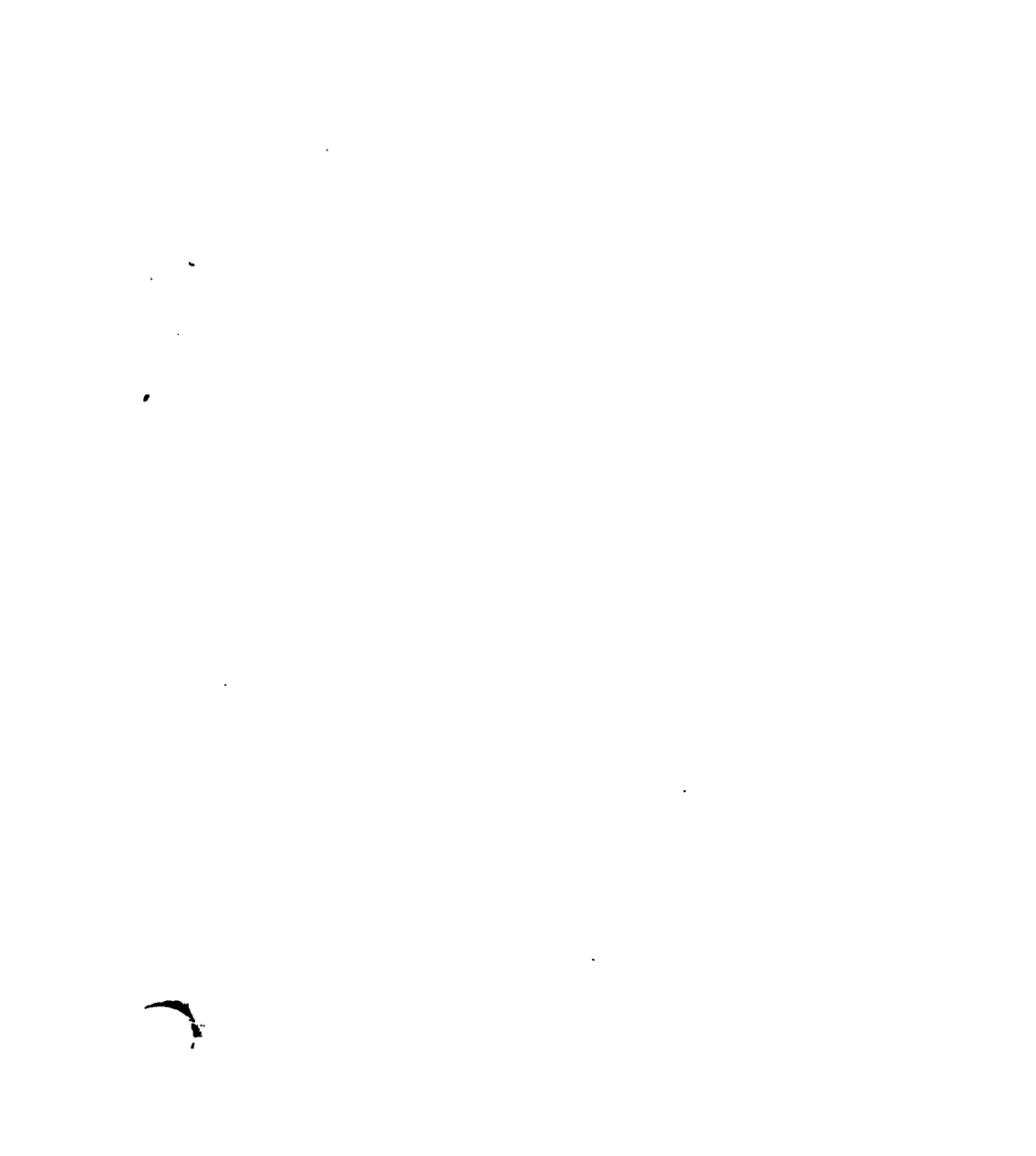
And crowns her with it, speaking terms of love.
Metempsychosis, thou hast done thy work !
The hapless Ariadne, now no more
Fated to shiver on the Stygian bank,
Evolves into a goddess spurning earth
And things of sense, united with a god,
Radiant with joy ineffable and smiles,
Where grief so lately set its murderous mark.
Thus slowly roll the many-tinted clouds
Onward and upward, bearing into bliss
Man's great deliv'rer Bacchus and his court.
O Bacchus, Dionysus, earth's great sun !
Indeed, far more than sun art thou to us :
Half of his time bright Helios hides his beams,
Leaving the world in darkness and confused ;
Whilst thou incarnate in the blest grape's juice,
All days, all nights, all times illuminest,
Flashing thy presence into saddest hearts,
Making light shine where darkness reigned before.
We pay our homage, children of the vine,
To thee, dear god, who in our fostering arms

Hast grown from infancy to manhood's force—
From the slim sapling to the rich ripe grape,
Whence, as we trample, gush the red streams forth,
A while to slumber in their wooden tomb ;
Until at length thy godship issues forth,
Potent renewer of the souls of men.
All the gods love we, for 'tis through the gods
That Nature holds companionship with man ;
They are the clear-voiced tongues by which she speaks ;
But thou, dear god, art all supreme with us :
Our joy in youth, our solace in old age,
Whom from thy birth we've tended, till at length
Thou bringest in full cups thy precious blood
To guerdon our hard labour. At thy shrine
O Father, Son, and Brother, all in one,
We prostrate fall in solemn adoration,
And cry ' Evøe ! ' with no doubtful voice:
Glory to thee, Winegiver, man's best friend !

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